

WORK STRESS, SATISFACTION, COMMITMENT, ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AMONG SENIOR WORKERS

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Most workplaces in the Western societies face increasing average workforce ages and limited access to recruiting younger workers, all of which are due to demographic changes. Retention of senior workforce has become important to maintain manpower and competence, and also avoid pension costs caused by early retirement. Although studies on relationships between age and work effectiveness show inconsistent findings, it should be acknowledged that workability and coping capacities of the workers might decline with increasing ages, and that retention of seniors may then cause increase in work-related stress.

The purpose of the study was to investigate if there are differences between employees over 55 years old and employees below 55 years old, firstly regarding how they experience the psychosocial work environment, and secondly their mental health (depression and anxiety).

The issues were researched by data from a Swedish sample of 42 318 whereas 6 364 working in the private sector and 35 954 working in the public sector. The response rate was 87 percent. The majority of the responders were women, approximately 73 percent. The age ranged between 16-66 years of age. The questionnaire used was QPSNordic and included questions about psychosocial environment such as work demand, work control, leadership, organisational environment, social support, job satisfaction, work motivation, role conflicts, and predictability. A scale measuring depression and anxiety (HAD) was also used. The validity and reliability have been tested for all scales.

QPS-Nordic scales showed lower values for respondents aged 55+ as compared to the 45-54 years old including Quantitative job demands, Demands on decision making, Learning demands, Role conflicts, Empowerment, Collegial support, and Predictability. Senior workers are generally not complaining more about work-related stress problems than their younger colleagues. Moreover workers aged 55+ reported highest scores on Job Satisfaction and Organisational Commitment, lowest on Anxiety, and lower Depression scores than workers aged 35-54. As Depression scores correlate with work stress and were expected to increase with age, the results indicate that a "Healthy worker effect" is in operation where the more vulnerable workforce that should display the highest levels of depression, over years have left the workforce. Although valid for the observed group, the lower stress scores observed for the seniors probably applies to samples where workers with high depression have exited from the workforce.

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